



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Conservation Technical Assistance

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

www.pa.nrcs.usda.gov



Communicating the Values of Conservation Technical Assistance

This presentation will define:

- Program Purpose, State of the Land, and Conservation Values
- Customers
- Authorizing Legislation, Regulations, and Agency Policies
- Use of CTA at the Field Level
- CTA and the Role of Partnerships
- Use of CTA Above the Field Level



Purpose

- Provide technical assistance to private landowners and other land managers
- Provide technical assistance through a national network of locally respected, technically skilled, professional conservationists
- Deliver technical assistance through conservation values that form the foundation of our agency
- Produce environmental outcomes



America's Private Lands: Conserve, Maintain, and Improve

- 70 percent of the land (1.4 billion acres) in the lower 48 States is owned by private landowners
- 88 percent of all surface water falls on private land before reaching lakes, streams, and groundwater aquifers
- The conservation health and productivity of private lands depends on the millions of individual decisions landowners make everyday



NRCS Conservation Values

1. Our conservation assistance is used **VOLUNTARILY** by our customers.
2. **Science** is the foundation for voluntary conservation on private lands.
3. Our conservation assistance is **site-specific**.
4. Natural resource concerns cannot be treated in isolation. We must use a **systems approach**.
5. Coordinated action should be encouraged on a **watershed or landscape scale**.
6. **Local leadership and partnerships** are critical to success.



Dr. Hugh H. Bennett
First Chief of SCS

Our Customers: A Broad Array

Individuals

- Farmers
- Ranchers
- Forest Landowners

Private Nongovernmental Organizations

- Citizen groups
- Youth groups
- Conservation groups
- Farm and ranch groups

Government

- Tribes, Nation-to- Nation
- County and other local government units
- State government (highway, health, recreation, water resources, and regional planning)
- Federal departments and agencies such as Defense, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, Health and Human Services and Interior

Businesses

- Professional consultants who provide engineering, planning, environmental assessment, tax assessment, and natural resource management services

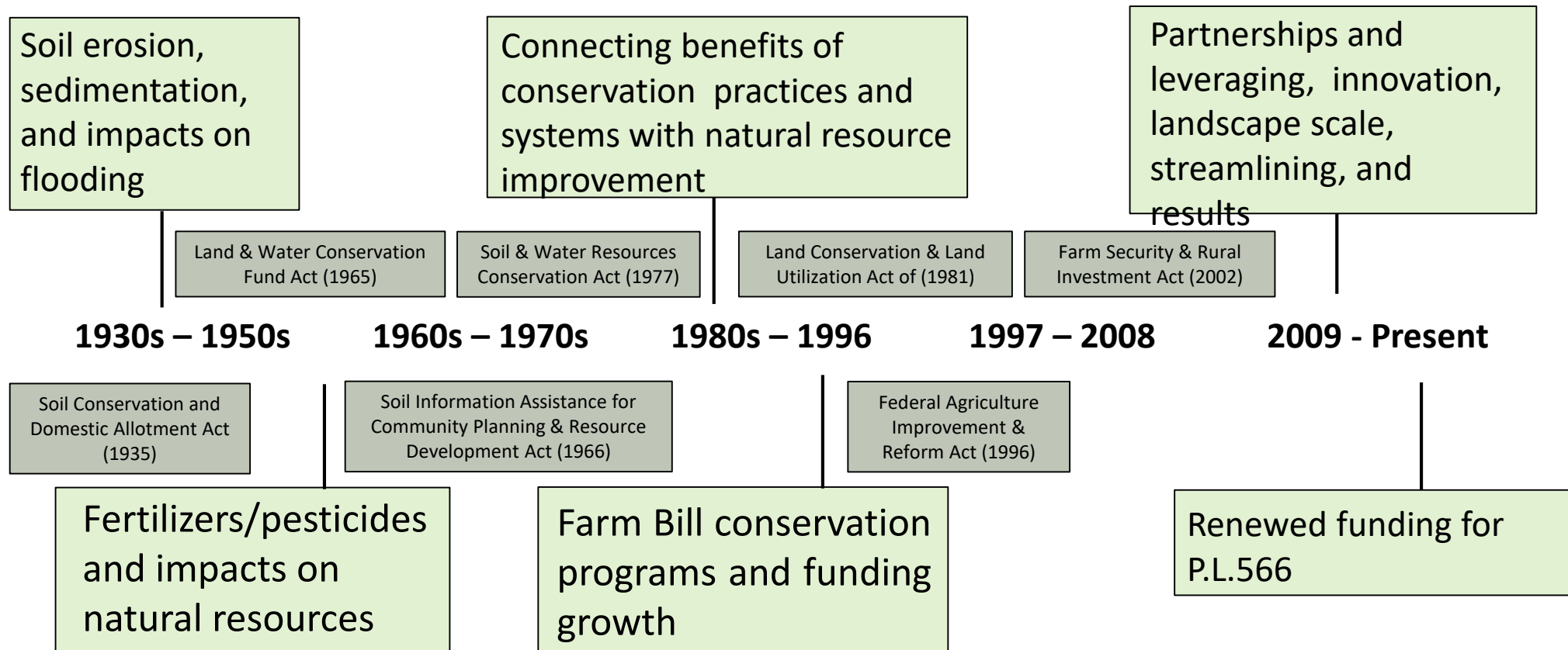


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NRCS Conservation Technical Assistance Through the Decades



CTA Funding

- Congress has changed the no-year designation for CTA Program funds to a two-year appropriation.
- CTA funds are available for obligation for up to two fiscal years.



CTA Final Rule

The CTA Program Rule, [7 CFR Part 610](#), provides the purpose and scope of the technical assistance furnished through the program. This rule provides that the CTA Program is the base technical assistance program for natural resource conservation for the NRCS. NRCS is assigned responsibility by the Secretary of Agriculture for the technical phases of planning and applying conservation practices on the land through decisionmakers.

National Policies Governing Conservation Technical Assistance

[\(Title 400, General Manual \(GM\), Part 400\)](#): decisionmaking relating to NRCS programs and related responsibilities and activities

[\(190-GM, Part 410\)](#). Public participation activities are to be consistent with the requirements of applicable Federal statutes, including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) policy and regulations, Endangered Species Act (ESA) regulations, National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) regulations and policy ([36 CFR Part 800](#) and [420-GM, Part 401](#)), Indian Trust Responsibilities ([410-GM, Part 405](#)), and Civil Rights requirements, as well as any applicable local or State statutes.

[Title 210, National Engineering Manual, P](#)

[Part 501, Subpart A](#); [Title 190, National Environmental Compliance Handbook, Part 610](#);

[Title 190, National Cultural Resources Procedures Handbook, Part 601](#).

TSP citation for conservation application.

[190-GM, Part 405](#) Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planning (CNMP): CNMP development

Title 440, Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Part 525,

[\(Title 450, General Manual \(GM\), Part 403\)](#)

What Products does CTA Deliver?

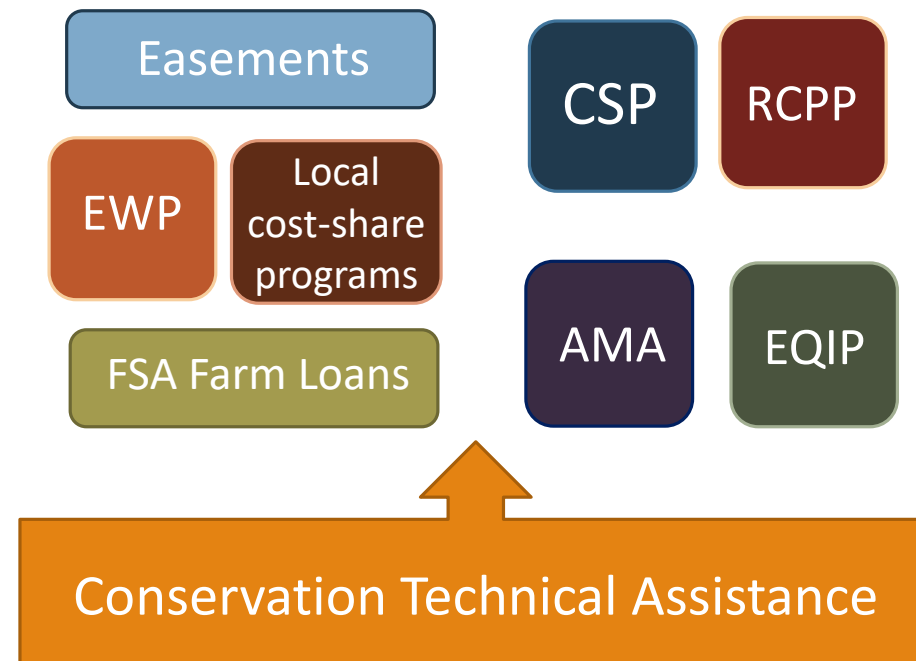
The majority of funds for the CTA Program are used for staff costs (salary, benefits, etc.) and other essential infrastructure support activities. These include products and services at the field, regional and State level —

- Site-specific conservation planning and technical consultation
- Areawide conservation planning and technical consultation
- Technical assistant to help customers implement conservation practices and systems
- Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) and Assessment
- Development, evaluation, and distribution of conservation technologies and technical information.
- Financial support for training, travel, and other activities associated with operating a nationwide field delivery system.



CTA is the Foundation

- Provides a substantive level of technical expertise, background, and support for Federal, Tribal, State, and local conservation programs as well as other NRCS programs.
- Enables other NRCS programs by facilitating conservation planning, interagency coordination, technical consultations, and collaboration with decisionmakers that results in implementing conservation practices and conservation systems.



A Broad Foundation with Broad Congressional Authorities

CTA Program Objectives

- i. Provide conservation technical assistance to individuals or groups of decisionmakers, communities, conservation districts, units of State and local government, Tribes, and others to voluntarily conserve, maintain, and improve natural resources.
- ii. Collect, analyze, interpret, display, and disseminate information about the status, condition, and trend of soil, water, and related natural resources so that people can make informed decisions for natural resource use and management.
- iii. Provide soils and other natural resource information and interpretation to individuals or groups of decisionmakers, communities, States, and others to aid sound decision-making in the wise use and management of soil resources.
- iv. Provide community, watershed, and areawide technical assistance in collaboration with units of government to develop and implement resource management plans that conserve, maintain, and improve natural resources.
- v. Provide conservation technical assistance to decisionmakers to assist them to comply with Federal, State, Tribal, and local environmental regulations and related requirements and to prepare them to become eligible to participate in other Federal, State, and local conservation programs.
- vi. Develop, adapt, and transfer effective science-based technologies and tools for assessment, management, and conservation of natural resources.
- vii. Provide conservation technical assistance to agricultural producers to comply with the highly erodible land (HEL) and wetland (Swampbuster) conservation compliance provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended.
- viii. Assess the effects of conservation practices and systems on the condition of natural resources.



Technical Foundation for Our Programs and Services

The strength of NRCS programs is only as good as its foundation, as provided by CTA which ensures we have:



- A highly trained, technically skilled staff able to develop solutions customized for our customers
- Site-specific conservation plans that are science-based
- Science-based and time-proven conservation practice standards
- Science-based guides and technical information by which to plan and implement conservation practices
- Sound resource inventories
- Extensive implementation of technical training
- An avenue for innovation

CTA: Creating a Highly Skilled Workforce

Employees are trained to plan and apply conservation practices and systems based on a site-specific basis.

To do this, the workforce consists of many technical disciplines including the following:

Agronomy	Cultural Resources	Forestry	Range Conservation
Anthropology	Ecology	Geology	Sociology
Archaeology	Economics	History	Soil Conservation
Biology	Engineering	Hydrology	Soil Science

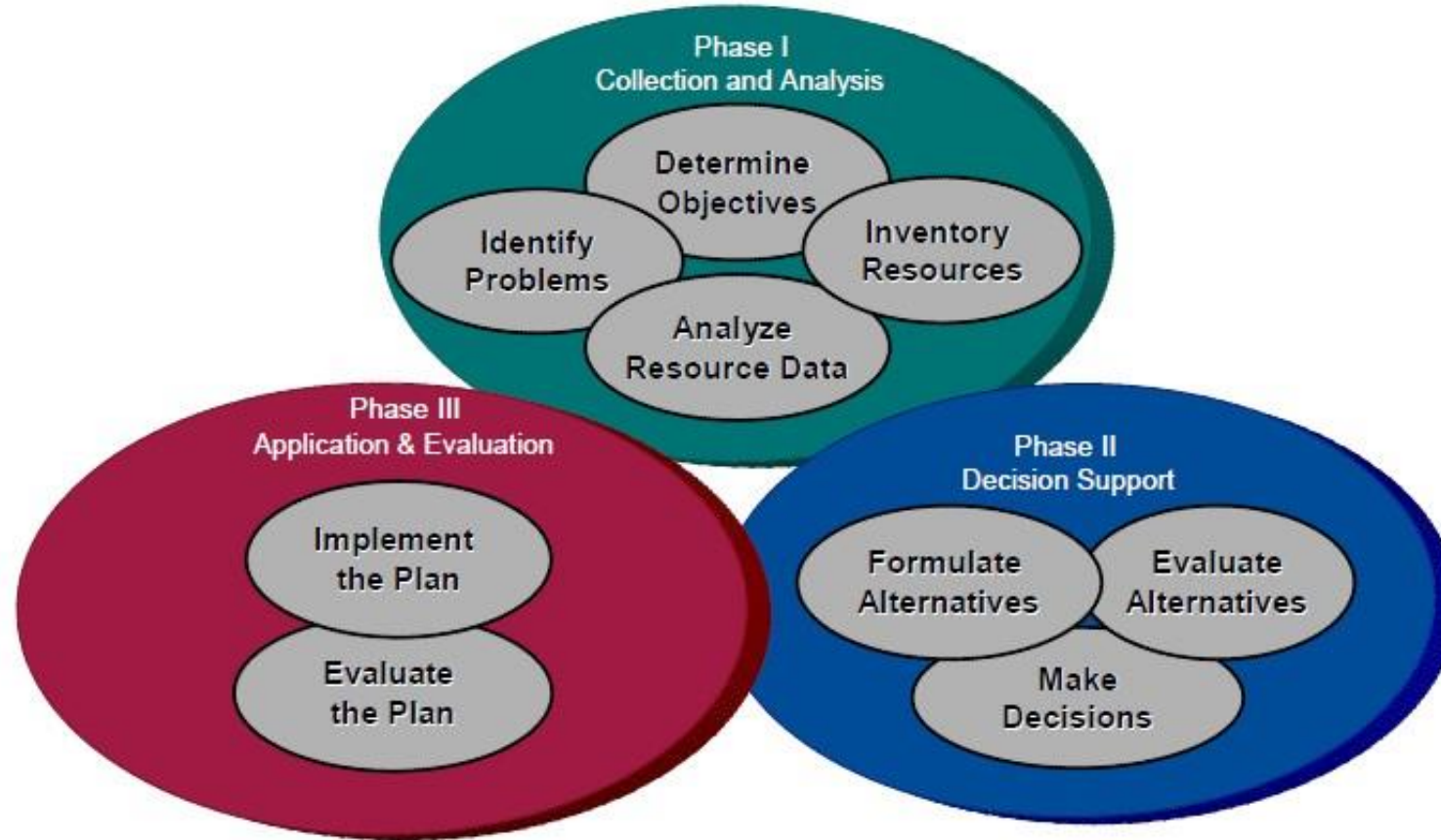


Delivering CTA at the Field Level

- Combines art and science; a proven process, supported by experienced technical specialists
- Supports a planning process that is program neutral
- Provides the decision-maker a science-based product that recognizes that natural resource concerns cannot be treated in isolation – soil, water, air, plants, animals, and humans are all part of an integrated ecosystem with interdependencies
- Includes components that conservation planners factor in:
 - Farmer's/Rancher's objectives
 - On-site effects and off-site impacts
 - Alternative solutions that are practical and fit the operation – not a prescription of Best Management Practices (BMPs)
 - Economic considerations (costs/benefits)
 - Adaptive management; a living document to adjust to changing conditions, technologies, and lessons learned

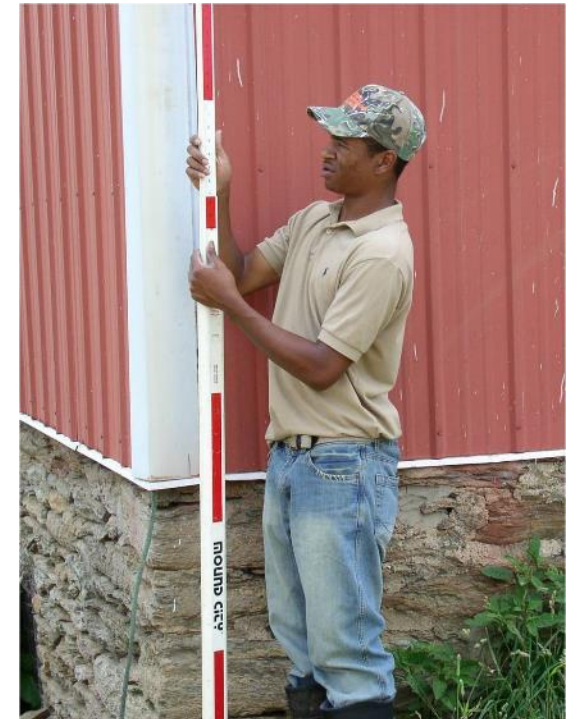


Delivering CTA at the Field Level: The Nine Steps of Conservation Planning



Delivering CTA at the Field Level: Conservation Implementation

- Survey, design, and lay out conservation practices on sites identified by the decisionmaker.
- Provide assistance for installing and implementing conservation practices.
- Certify that practices installed are in accordance with NRCS standards.



CTA and Farm Bill Compliance: HEL/Swampbuster

Conservation Compliance

CTA Program funds are used to assist agricultural producers in complying with the HEL and Wetland Conservation (Swampbuster) conservation compliance provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended. The objectives of these conservation compliance provisions are to—



- i. Reduce soil loss due to wind and water erosion.
- ii. Protect the Nation's long-term capability to produce food and fiber.
- iii. Reduce sedimentation and improve water quality.
- iv. Assist in preserving the functions and values of the Nation's wetlands.

Areawide Planning

- NRCS provides community, watershed, and areawide conservation planning assistance to local, State, and Federal agencies and Tribal governments
- NRCS also may provide resource information for community, watershed, and area-wide planning efforts by others, including non-government consultants
- Plans are developed with a client for a watershed or other geographic area defined by the client and stakeholders
- This broad-scale conservation plan addresses all resource problems identified and contains alternative solutions



Implementing Federal, State, and Local Laws

At a minimum, NRCS employees must have enough knowledge of Federal, State, Tribal, and local laws and regulations to—

- (1) Recognize that a contemplated facility or practice may be subject to such laws and regulations.
- (2) Provide the landowner or operator with the name and address of the agency or official from whom application forms and detailed information can be obtained.
- (3) Furnish technical assistance for planning or implementing conservation practices that may be subject to the requirements of Federal, State, Tribal, or local laws and regulations.

National
Environmental
Policy Act
(NEPA)

Endangered
Species Act
(ESA)

National Historic
Preservation Act
(NHPA)

Other Federal, State, and
local environmental and
cultural resource
protection policies,
regulations, and
Executive orders

The Conservation Partnership

CTA works through a voluntary conservation network that fosters partnership between NRCS, conservation districts, state conservation agencies, and millions of private landowners.

The Conservation Partnership expands NRCS's ability to put conservation on the ground.



CTA and Our Work with Partners

- NRCS works with conservation districts by participating in a locally led conservation process to assist individuals and groups with assessing conservation needs, making decisions, and implementing solutions.
 - Nationally, NRCS maintains memorandums of understanding with individual conservation districts
- Gathering input from a broad range of individuals, agencies, organizations, businesses, and Tribal governments is essential to locally led conservation.



Locally Led Conservation has been Around for a Long Time . . .

- 1935 Soil Conservation Act
 - Arkansas was the first to pass the law

“What SCS needed was a representative who could walk over a man’s (or woman’s) land with him (or her), lay out a conservation plan, and come back to help him (or her) install the more difficult practices and structures.”

(R.J. Morgan, 1966)



Formation of the Soil and Water Conservation Districts and NRCS—a local team working together

- After the 1935 Act was implemented, some people began to examine the best approach to get farmers interested in soil conservation. The most prominent individual was then Assistant Secretary, Milburn Wilson. Wilson conceived of the conservation district, a subdivision of the state that the local people would organize for the district and spread the word of soil conservation.
- Henry Wallace and FDR endorsed this concept and transmitted the Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law to governors of the states on February 27, 1937.
 - Arkansas was the first to pass the law.
 - Brown Creek Soil Conservation District in North Carolina was the first to sign an agreement with NRCS for technical assistance and equipment.

Delivering CTA Above the Field Level

- Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977
- Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG)
- National Planning Procedures Handbook
- NRI and CEAP



Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977 (RCA)

National Program for Soil and Water Conservation

The statute and policy states NRCS will develop and periodically update a program for furthering the conservation and protection of natural resources and provide reports to Congress and the public containing information gathered during the appraisal and the development of the program.



Field Office Technical Guides

Field Office Technical Guides (FOTGs) are the primary scientific references for NRCS conservation technical assistance delivery and are available for use by other agencies and individuals. They contain technical information regarding the conservation of soil, water, air, related plant, animal, and human resources.



National Planning Procedures Handbook



The National Planning Procedures Handbook provides consistent national policy and guidance for effective conservation planning at both site-specific and areawide basis. Conservation planning following these proven procedures integrates science-based resource assessment and conservation practice standards that are maintained in Field Office Technical Guides.



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Evaluating Outcomes: NRI and CEAP

National Resources Inventory (NRI)

- Collects, analyzes, interprets, displays, and disseminates information regarding the status, condition, and trend of soil, water, and related natural resources
- A statistical survey of land use and natural resource conditions and trends on non-Federal lands

Conservation Effects and Assessment Project (CEAP)

- Assessments of environmental benefits and effects of conservation programs
- On a regional or watershed basis
- Studies the benefits of most conservation practices and resource management systems implemented through conservation programs